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WHY AM I A QUAKER?

TO ONE who before all else would be a Christian, the reasons for adhesion to any given denomination must lie in the circumstances of his education, and in his preference for that form of Christianity, in doctrine and practice, which distinguishes the body to which he adheres. I am a Friend, then, because for two centuries my ancestors have as Friends served their generations ; and yet more from a conviction that in Quakerism is to be found "what Christianity is in itself," divested of non-essentials and relieved of the accretions it had gathered since the apostolic times.

The Society of Friends grew out of a vivid apprehension of the spiritual presence of Christ made perceptible to men, especially to those who welcomed that presence ; of an intense faith in God's universal love to mankind, and an honest endeavor to carry the reformation of Christianity to completeness by a return to the tenets and to the life, moral and religious, of the first Christians. Christ the eternal Word, Christ incarnate, and Christ ascended, yet ever enlightening and teaching men, was their foundation. Without reference to the historic fact, they resumed many of the views held by the orthodox Greek fathers as to God's nearness to man, man's affinity to God, and the universality of the Father's love to those who even the heathen knew were "his offspring." Quaker Christianity commends itself to me by these traits, and especially by its universal spirit. Assured of the operation of the Spirit of God upon the mind and the conscience, the Friends accept without reserve the testimony of the Scriptures to themselves, that "holy men of old spoke as they were moved of the Holy Ghost," and regard the Bible as the only divinely-authorized record of the doctrines they are bound to believe. They hold that the Bible is to be understood and applied by spiritual aid, and have based their Christianity upon its truths and facts, under the illumination of the Spirit. But they have adopted no special theory of inspiration, and have expressed their belief chiefly in Scripture terms, whereby they have escaped serious theological difficulties.

The Friends accept in their fullest import the words that God loves "the world," while he hates sin. Many who have been lovers of their kind and have looked beneath the surface of things, have found themselves face to face with the sin and misery of their race, and have emerged from that dark shadow giving varying answers to the problems it suggests. Of such an experience George Fox wrote: "I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness, and in that I saw the infinite love of God." Nevertheless, he did not weakly fly to any superficial view of the dread reality and fruits of sin. He and his associates had felt too profoundly "the immeasurable nature of the compunction awakened by wrong-doing—the total inability to forgive one's self—the sense of an evil that is irreparable and sin beyond all gauge,"* to deal lightly with either redemption or retribution. Their conviction was that through and by Christ an offer of salvation was made to all, and that the ultimate fate of each soul is determined by the acceptance or rejection of divine light and love. Believing in God as Creator and King, and recognizing his omnipresence in all the processes whereby the universe has become what it is, they prized above all his relation to men as a Father, to Jew and Gentile, Christian and heathen, who, though marred by the effects of sin, hereditary and personal, still have a child-likeness to him and are the objects of his paternal love and care. This love, ever outflowing, found highest expression in the coming of Christ, who, as the Word that was with God and was God, became flesh, bringing God and man into closest union. As one with the Father and with us he revealed him, by his words, his life, his spirit, his death, in which he was "the propitiation for the sins of the whole world." Yet Christ is ever the Word, who touches the moral and religious nature of man, imparting to all some knowledge of God, some discernment of the right, some recoil from the evil, some aspiration after the good, some power of grace over sinful tendencies, and, if received, some quickening of the sluggish or dead soul into spiritual life and communion with God. In this the Friends have kept the distinction between human faculties and the divine Spirit, between conscience and Christ, have maintained individual responsibility, the necessity of Christ's death

* James Martineau, "Types of Ethical Theory," Vol. II., p. 66.

and life to recovery from sin, and have met the demand of the moral consciousness for a concurrence of supreme love with holiness in the removal of personal guilt. To my apprehension they have thus offered the truest order of Scripture teaching, and to the utmost have justified the ways of God to men. In thus recognizing a universal offer of salvation from sin, there is no undervaluing of the duty to spread abroad the facts and truths of the Bible, for the spirit of Quaker Christianity, as shown in its first period and again in the present, is an earnestly evangelizing one. Assured of finding in every conscience a witness for the truth, the obligation to carry the noontide of Christian knowledge to those sitting in the glimmer that lies beyond it is felt to be imperative.

The same inclusive spirit is shown in the conception of the invisible church as consisting of all those who have been saved, or are being saved, from sin through Christ; and of a visible church as an association of like persons, who, having conscious faith in him, are joined together for worship, work, and witnessing. Though hitherto a small body, the Friends have the most large-hearted views of the church; and as to membership in it, with John Woolman they know no narrowness concerning sects and opinions, provided there are evidences of the reign of Christ in men's souls. Though thus inclusive, their standard of Christian experience is not a low one, but as Christ overcame all evil, so they believe that through his grace and the Spirit's aid victory over all wilful and conscious sin may be known, so that we may really love God and man in the full measure of our individual capacity. It seems to me that this is the true thought as to salvation, not an impracticable one, but worthy of God's offer and man's acceptance.

The mode of worship of the Friends is as simple as its ideal is true and its experience delightful to those that enter into it. It looks upon the few or the many met in Christ's name as permitted to know the "real presence" and headship of Christ, with access, individual and united, through him unto the Father in spiritual communion, without the necessary intervention of any minister or priest. The "liberty of prophecy" accorded in this manner of worship admits of edifying one another, of heart-felt, united prayer and praise, and the preaching of the Word. If its ideal is high, it is the more exacting that worshippers shall habitually walk in the light, following the master in close companionship. But as it depends so little on prearrangement, it is empty indeed

unless there be real life in the congregation. In this simple worship there is a unique feature—the privileges given to women. Christianity is the only religion that has placed women in a true position. The sacred friendship of our Lord for the sisters at Bethany and for the group of noble women that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, with his hallowed love for his mother, prepared the way for this result and for the saying of Paul, “There is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.” The Friends apprehend that devout believers of either sex may receive spiritual gifts for the profit of all, and that among these is that gift of prophecy which fits the recipient for speaking to others unto edification, exhortation, and comfort. They have, therefore, made room in their organization for the exercise of such gifts by women, and have proved that the use of this liberty is consonant with all that is best in womanhood. They have found inestimable benefits from acting out with quiet confidence what they believe to be the teaching of the Bible in this respect.

It is a like comprehensive view of Christianity that has led the Friends to regard the “one baptism” as that whereby all members of the church are, through repentance, faith, and consecration to Christ, baptized by the one Spirit into the one body. They conceive that to the church the risen Christ in his last commission intrusted “the word of the truth of the Gospel” in the power of the imparted Spirit, and that the means the church was to use in baptism is “the ministry of the word and prayer,” whereby others are brought into vital union with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and all drink into one spiritual life. The true “communion” they find not in the reverent use of outward symbols, which they omit, but in welcoming the presence and pure reign of their Lord in the heart, so that in private devotion and in public worship the feast is kept, and they partake by faith of the body that was broken and of the blood that was shed for the many. “Believe and thou hast eaten,” wrote St. Augustine, and the Friend responds, “Amen.”

All Christians seek for guidance in duty from the Bible, providential circumstances, the counsel of friends, and the best use of their knowledge and judgment. To these the Friends add confidence in impressions of right made directly upon mind and heart. To walk in the light, and up to the light that Christ gives, is their ideal of a religious life. It leads to a strong sense of personal re-

sponsibility and of the sacredness of conscientious convictions. Perhaps it has been this more than anything else that has made them the van-guard in the struggle to secure freedom to every man to serve God according to his conscience, and to repudiate, from their origin, all persecution for religious opinions. I cannot but honor them for the victory won in this field through much suffering and some martyrdom, patiently borne, and for their share in handing down the heritage of religious liberty now enjoyed throughout the English-speaking world. Their love of liberty and of equal justice to all has given them "a genius for humanity," a sympathy with whatever has been best in free governments; and their principles, as expressed in the declaration of rights and laws of the Province of Pennsylvania, have had no inconsiderable influence in shaping the free institutions of America.

Intentness to act in harmony with the spirit of Christ has led them to anticipate or quickly to side with legal or moral reforms, and to have sympathy with the races subjected to oppression or looked upon as inferior. The reduction of capital punishment for crimes (once frightfully common in Great Britain), the reform of prisons, the abolition of the slave-trade and of slavery, the removal of the evils of intemperance, social purity, and the placing of all classes on an equality before the law, are among the movements in which they were pioneers or with which they were early and efficiently associated. As early as 1688 a written protest against slavery as unfit to be practised by Christians, was sent by some Friends from Germantown, Pennsylvania, to their superior meetings; and during the intervening period, until the abandonment of the system, they were among the most faithful in pleading for its suppression and the most Christian in the spirit of their protest against it. From its rise the Society of Friends has advocated great caution in the use of intoxicants, and it was the first Christian body to make the disuse of them a subject of disciplinary advice. It was a Friend who started "Father Matthew" on his beneficent crusade against "the drink," and up to the present time its influence has been persistent and active against the unspeakable miseries caused by the abuse of alcoholic beverages.

War has brought into exercise many heroic virtues, among them self-sacrificing courage in defence of the honor, the property, and the corporate existence of peoples. It has, doubtless, been the expression oftentimes of a lofty patriotism, and has been

providentially used or overruled to the advancement of the world. But human history has been largely written in blood: too generally war has been carried on in disregard of the sentiment of humanity, as well as of every other moral principle. To-day millions of men, forming the standing armies of Christendom, in the very prime of manhood, are withdrawn from productive industry and are supported by the toil of others. The severe labors they should perform are thrown to a degrading extent upon women; they are in a large measure debarred from the elevating influences of family life, are subjected to the idle vices of the barracks, debasing the populations around them and being debased by bestial passions.

The industries of Europe groan under the burdens these armies impose, until in Italy—the one Continental state from whose reports accurate information upon this subject can be had—the income-tax is 14 per cent. and the combined taxes upon the farmer equal 40 per cent. of the product of his land. Great nations, like France and Germany, armed with every device for slaughter that ingenuity can devise, and moved by ambition or revenge, stand ready to be hurled against each other. In the middle ages the Popes sometimes commanded a “truce of God,” to arrest such fratricidal strife. But to-day no European church but the Society of Friends lifts its voice in entreaty and protest, in Christ’s name, against such iniquity. When even philosophers like Spencer and Comte see that the military stage is a temporary one, through which peoples pass from barbarism to a true civilization, I cannot but rejoice to belong to a body that has confidence in the Prince of Peace, from whose teachings such philosophers have drawn their moral conceptions; that believes he is calling upon the church to condemn all war and to lead men, not into a cowardly devotion to money-making, but into labor in self-forgetting love to set each member of the body politic in his best estate, physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually. Be it that the time is far till this day comes, it is still well to labor and to wait with patient courage through the decades or the centuries till the end is gained.

The Bishop of Peterborough, in the *Contemporary Review* for January, 1886, vigorously defends the use of oaths by witnesses in courts and in other legal proceedings involving grave consequences; yet he desires that they should be abandoned. Moreover, with faintest hope, he looks forward to a time when men’s

words shall be as good as their oaths and the latter may be laid aside. The movement in this direction in Great Britain and America was begun by the Society of Friends, who believe that, although Christ recognized the rightfulness of legal oaths under the old dispensation, he distinctly forbade them in the kingdom of God he came to set up. During the last two and a half centuries the progress towards the end which the Bishop seems to regard as desirable has been a most hopeful one, and confirms a confidence that Christ's law of truth-speaking, "Swear not at all," was founded on a sure insight into our moral nature, and was intended to promote entire truthfulness, individual and national. To accept this view, and to be released from calling down a curse upon one's self in case, through infirmity, one should fail to speak the exact truth, wears to me the aspect of a privilege.

Doubtless the reaction of the Puritans against the license of their times was pressed to an extreme—a course sometimes necessary in righting great departures from the true standard of living; but they had intense moral earnestness, and a love of righteousness that made them lightly esteem a right eye if it stood in the way of its realization. While sharing in the wider view that it is safe to follow him who came, not as an ascetic, but as reverently enjoying his Father's bounties, there are some who still think that this means taking up the cross daily and maintaining simplicity in dress, manners, and modes of living. They judge that amid the abandonment to material success which marks our time it is well to keep the body under, and the soul's eye clear, by wholesome self-denial—a tradition among the Friends that some of us would not willingly let die.

For a long time the Friends have done garrison duty in defence, as they apprehend, of some truths overlooked by others; simply "holding the fort"; but within the last quarter of a century a spiritual awakening and power have come to them, and in all parts aggressive action is taking the place of quietism. In education, preliminary and collegiate, in authorship, in home and foreign missions, they have assumed an activity unknown since their early days, and their most thoughtful members are looking forward with the hope that they will continue to take part with their brethren of all the churches in extending the benign sway of the kingdom of God.

J. A. R.